



LatinoNetwork



April 29, 2020

The Honorable Kate Brown
Office of the Governor
900 Court Street NE, Suite 254
Salem, OR 97301-4047

Dear Governor Brown,

We write today immersed in the COVID-19 pandemic and its unprecedented disruption to the lives of Oregon's children. As a coalition of organizations ranging from statewide education advocates to culturally specific community-based nonprofits, we are witnessing firsthand the pandemic's impact on the children and families we serve, particularly on low-income families, rural communities, and Black, Indigenous, and people of color.

COVID-19 has turned the world upside down for every child. From our littlest ones to our graduating seniors, a generation of students is navigating an unfamiliar transition to distance learning while yearning for lost connections: their friends, their teachers, and all those who make them feel safe and loved at school.

And while the virus does not discriminate, **Oregon's most vulnerable children and communities are disproportionately bearing the brunt of the pandemic.** The children who our state's public systems have historically underserved are more likely to face barriers to accessing distance learning, experience sustained economic hardship, have family members who are front-line workers, and know the heartbreak of losing someone to COVID-19. The consequences of such distress can be lifelong and intergenerational.

On April 14, Oregonians heard your call to act in a "smart and deliberative fashion that keeps us moving forward, instead of sending us backward." We couldn't agree more.

Our challenge is greater than ensuring every student stays on track to read and write. **How will Oregon ensure that children truly recover from a crisis of this magnitude?** Rather than leaving them to bear the trauma of COVID-19 for years to come, neuroscience tells us that we can transform this emergency into a positive moment for children and their development.

Now more than ever, we need to take decisive action. Public and private sectors must come together to provide children with critical academic and social-emotional supports, harness their resiliency in the face of adversity, and help them emerge from this crisis even stronger.

Leaning into collaboration will be essential to ensuring our public systems rise to the occasion and provide care and connection for every child. Community-based organizations have built trusted relationships with children and families across Oregon, and many are dedicated to helping children overcome systemic barriers to education. **We stand ready to work in partnership with state leaders, school districts, and teachers to develop a unified approach helping students advance their academic learning and social-emotional growth during and beyond COVID-19.**

With budget shortfalls and difficult decisions on the horizon, **we urge policymakers at the state, regional, and local levels to act with children as our north star.** The pandemic's disproportionate impact demands that Oregon redouble support for our most vulnerable children, including Black, Indigenous, and children of color; rural children; children experiencing poverty; children with disabilities; English language learners; immigrant and refugee children; children experiencing houselessness; children in foster care; and children engaged in the juvenile justice system. **Rather than aggravate the pandemic's impact with across-the-board budget cuts, Oregon's children need a nuanced response that recognizes their diverse needs.**

We applaud your commitment to preventing an uneven recovery from COVID-19. **To support your efforts—and fulfill our state's dedication to educational equity as reflected by the Student Success Act—every Oregon leader's decision-making must consider:**

- **How** are we meaningfully engaging students and families from our most vulnerable communities to better understand their experience during this crisis and the impact of our decisions?
- **How** are we directing resources to reach children with the greatest need for support, and investing in Oregon's long-term capacity to provide equitable access to meaningful learning opportunities?
- **How** are we holding ourselves accountable to addressing racial and economic disparities in access to quality early learning and education that impact historically underserved students?
- **How** are we sustaining and bolstering the unique assets, strengths, and cultural contributions of Oregon's diverse students and communities?
- **How** are we creating opportunities to collaborate, build partnerships, and align strategies across sectors and systems to effectively support all students and families?

These questions will guide a forward-thinking response to COVID-19 that puts Oregon's children first. As leadership moves to action, **we, the undersigned, expect and look forward to playing an integral role in state, regional, and local policymaking efforts** that address immediate challenges and help alleviate—not exacerbate—longstanding inequities for students.

The virus has created many unknowns, and the road ahead is complex. But one reality is clear: The stronger our children emerge from this crisis, the stronger Oregon's long-term recovery will be.

Thank you for your leadership in these trying times and your commitment to our state's children.

Sincerely,

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cc:

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